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FRITZ REDL

Understanding Children's Behavior

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Understanding Children's Behavior

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. . . want help on certain problems? Use the guide below for ready reference.

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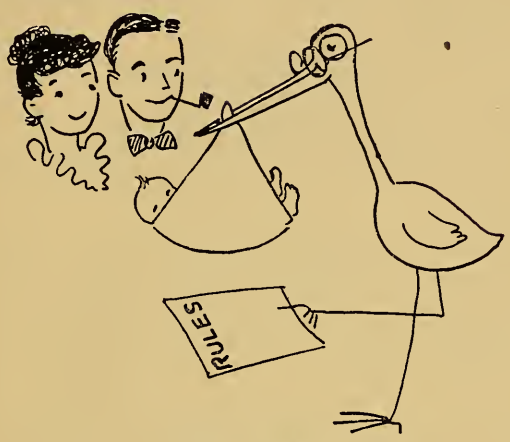
Understanding Children's Behavior



"Brand new!"

IT'S COMMON SENSE!

THAT new car of yours arrived with a "User's Guide." Remember? Wouldn't it be wonderful if babies did too? Sending a user's guide along doesn't mean that the new car isn't any good. Nor does it mean the dealer thinks you are stupid. He only wants to tell you this much:

1. That it is a new model. And—even though the 1902 model was all right in its way and served its purpose, it wouldn't do to treat your this year's model the same.

2. That even the best car runs better if you know the most important things about the way it operates and what makes it tick. That doesn't mean you should become an expert—but there

is a minimum familiarity with the ways of your vehicle which you need.

3. That knowing a few things about your car and thinking about them doesn't mean your car is sick or in need of repair. Even the healthiest car needs certain fixing and checkups occasionally to remain healthy. Your user's guide is not a handbook for repair mechanics. It is meant to help the happy owner of a healthy car keep it fit.

Well, what are you so surprised about? Aren't children at least as complex as cars? Don't you need to put at least as much thinking and consideration into keeping them fit as you are ready to put into that prize possession among more material goods, your car?

So you see—the determination to *know your child* really isn't so fanciful as it seems. Such knowledge is one of those common sense things which you can't very well do without—only nobody sells babies on the market.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN—"HE GROWS"?

One-year-old

Children are not supposed to grow evenly at all times, constantly improving while they go along. Between birth and high school there is a variety of different "stages" to go through. Each

of these stages has its own laws and statutes and is different from each other one.

We know plenty about these developmental phases. Scientific research has unearthed a great amount of helpful knowledge

An in-betweener

which is easily available to you. Look up details in some of the books on child development in your library, but remember this about all these periods:

During childhood, which usually lasts until around eight or ten, your youngster's job is to grow gradually into your family, your world, and the school world. Children of that age usually are trying to master the immediate world around them, are at ease if they can do what you suggest they do, are disturbed if they can't. They grow *toward* you—their parent, and their teacher —if you are halfway smart and handle them right.

During preadolescence, which is usually the period between eight or ten and thirteen or fourteen, even the most normal children experience *temporary disorganization.* They really still look like young children, and remind you in no way of the later teen-ager. And yet they are losing a little of their childhood charm, becoming awkward in appearance, untidy in habits, confused and irritating in behavior. This does not mean that something is wrong with them. It is nature's way of loosening up the childhood pattern of life before all the many adolescent changes take place and are finally established.

Juke-box joy

During adolescence a lot of reorientation happens in youngsters' feelings toward their own body, toward sex; a strong need for emancipation from the childhood way of life takes place; there is a pull away from as well as toward something new.

It is important for your adolescent child to complete the separation from his childhood world so haltingly begun during his preadolescent years—to learn how to like and love people he has hitherto not been interested in, how to defend himself against enemies, how to survive and play a role in the teen-age group. It is equally important that he learn new forms of love, new sensations of body and mind, and how to live with these new experiences for quite a while before they can be translated into adult satisfactions. It is just as important that, during this phase, he develops an anticipation of independence from you, his parent or teacher, which makes tolerable the long stretch of training and study under conditions of prolonged childhood dependency on the family purse and the schoolroom's behavior dictates. It is also important that he tries out new ideals, falls in and out with vocational hopes and aversions, shapes his own personality after

a collective image of many heroes met in real life and through the books he reads.

At the same time all this happens, several changes occur in the physical development of your child's body. He has to learn to understand, live with, and accept the facts not only of sex in general, but of his own sex sensations and body changes. He has to drop his attempt to act as "cute" as little kids are expected to, and—in spite of your disappointment and his concern at his own clumsiness—get ready to step into the forms of behavior which will become him later as an adult.

And, last but not least, while he grows away from you, while he grows into a new and strange world, and changes in body

Learning disobedience

and mind, he also is expected to change the pattern of values by which he lives. Old values are not entirely replaced, of course. The basic laws of good and bad remain unchanged, but there is a lot to forget and a lot to learn. Many things which are demanded of the small child—such as obedience and submission to adult judgment—are not really values in later life. Submission

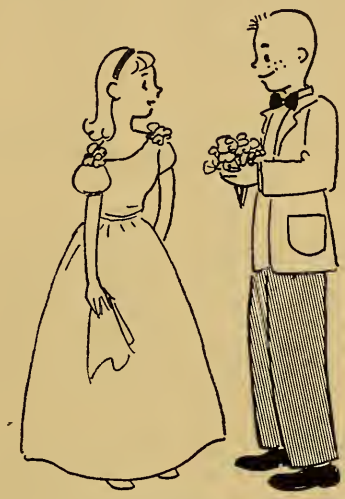
to other people's demands remains right only if these people are themselves moral, intelligent, and have good judgment.

Even though for years they have been made to feel guilty for acts of "insubordination" to decisions from above, the young adult Johnny and Mary will have many value problems suddenly thrown into their lives which they have never encountered before. It is easy for the little child to be "good," for then being "good" simply means obedience to adult demands. But Johnny has to learn how to feel *not guilty* for not doing what some stupid and/or corrupt business senior tells him, and *not guilty* for leaving a job which will obviously limit his career and stop all future development of his abilities. The young adult has thousands of much more complex decisions to make in balancing his own urge for love and power with the laws of decency and the inevitable consequences of his actions. It is then that the value of independent and wise action is really fully experienced.

Since it is hard to say when and how your child will enter any one of these developmental periods, it is wise for a parent or teacher to familiarize himself thoroughly with the next stage about two years before he thinks it will begin. Children may start one new phase a little earlier than another, and you will be less worried if you know just what is going on. Children do not all grow at the same rate. Each child has his own individual way of going through life. It is important for you to remember this point when you read books on child development and mental hygiene.

Children often need a lot of time to outgrow "hangovers" from previous periods of development. Don't get worried about that. The more secure they feel in the new phase they are growing into, the easier it will be for them eventually to drop what remains of a previous chapter. Children will often act confused or will misbehave, especially when they change from one developmental period into another. Thus, the most vehement forms of growth are often unpleasant for you, but very important for the child's development.

If you are too impatient about making children move along, you are likely to harm them. On the other hand, if you show no interest whatsoever in their development, you are likely to keep them back. A wise mixture of the two is easy only if you watch your child more intensively than those books you read would seem to suggest.



First formal

Don't forget—it is the ultimate goal of growth to have that child of yours develop self-reliance. Don't forget—it is your destiny as a parent to stimulate that growth, even if it is at your own expense. During the first childhood years that growth of children is a happy event. Each step is fascinating and thrilling, and you love and enjoy it. For growing means that your children are always moving closer and closer to you and your patterns, and comprehending and accepting more fully the world you have set around them. As long as Johnny and Mary grow "the way they should," you have nothing to worry about.

But preadolescence and adolescence are less easy to take. They are different. During these periods even healthy growth may be expressed in the form of rather uncomfortable and embarrassing

problem behavior. And so you worry twice: first, for all the things which don't develop so well and all the upsets which mean disturbed development, and then, for all the perfectly normal but seemingly confusing forms of healthy growth.

You could use a user's guide during these years more than during the beginning years of your youngster's life. Growing up is not an easy job, either for your child or for you.

BEHAVIOR THAT HAS YOU WORRIED

Sometimes it looks as though Junior isn't learning what he ought to learn—isn't acquiring the skills he ought to have. Often, this is not quite the case. You see, children have a limited capacity for learning new things. And the area they have in which to learn is so much wider than you think.

Here is Johnny. He has learned how to adjust to your demands of behavior, is well toilet-trained, and has eating habits which aren't too bad. All of a sudden, he doesn't seem to improve any more; in fact, he goes back a little from where he was. So you think he isn't learning.

Sometimes another thing happens: Johnny has some other learning to do which just doesn't happen to be on your official agenda. For instance, he has just started to kindergarten. Can you imagine what tremendous adjustment it requires to look at so many other children, to figure out how they act and what that teacher really wants, and understand all the other things which make up life with others? Johnny is avidly learning how to know when to fight back and when not. How to distinguish the kids he really would enjoy from those who don't like him anyway, how to adjust to new demands, new limitations, new permissions and standards so different from those at home. How much learning goes on at this time on the social level! Why are you sur-

The new girl

prised that some of the other learning temporarily stops, or that he forgets for a while other things he already knows?

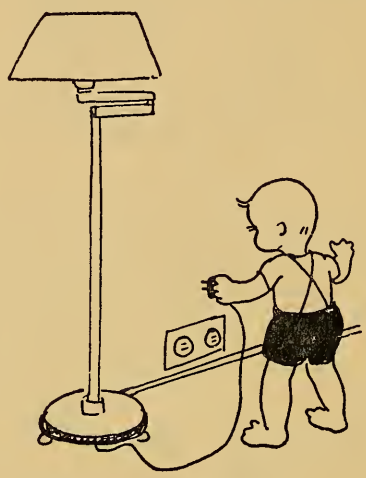
Or think of Mary, who has just entered junior high, in a different neighborhood and with so many more teachers making demands upon her life than when she enjoyed the security of the grade school homeroom. All she has to learn about life with strangers and youngsters of a different and wider age range outweighs whatever temporary waning you may notice in her ambition to bring home the best marks.

In short, it pays to look at the whole life pattern of your child before you decide whether or not you should worry about his behavior. Find out what learning really goes on in all phases of the child's living. Only then can you gauge the importance of progress or its lack in respect to the total field of child growth.

BEYOND THE PLAY PEN

There is a time when the play pen is the safest and happiest as well as healthiest place for little Mary or Johnny—except for

the moments when you pick your child up. There comes a time when the play pen becomes too confining. Johnny's wish to crawl around outside is very healthy and important indeed, and you ought to yield to it more and more, even though this involves more discomfort and supervision on your part. And don't get angry when he doesn't like toys which gave him fun before. He has outgrown them, and they have outgrown their usefulness.



Experimentation

The same thing is true for rules, routines, punishments, rewards, and even the way you talk to him. The way you handled things was all right for a while. But it isn't all right any more. The reason your old techniques don't work isn't because Johnny is worse than he was, or that they weren't any good to begin with. It is simply that they wouldn't fit the many important new things which are happening to Johnny. Here is some of the growth to look for.

Johnny is reaching out for a little more independence, for a wider range of experimentation. All new experimentation is a little less "safe" for him than the things he was allowed to do before. Yet maybe it is time for it. Maybe from now on you should let him pull out and put in that electric plug, because now you

Independence

can make him see that you have reasons to warn him of the danger. Maybe you shouldn't force Mary to cross the street with her hand in yours each time, because now you can teach her safety rules. Maybe you wouldn't want to just say, "No," any more, because now you can afford to reason it out. Maybe you don't have to forbid Johnny to go around with those neighbor children, because now, with your help, he is ready to learn from new experiences. Maybe it wasn't right to scold him in front of the other children when he misbehaved, for now he has a longer memory, and you might as well talk it over later when you are alone with him. Maybe you needn't worry any more if he reads this, hears that, notices one thing or another, because he is already at the stage where you can bet your life if you have his confidence he will ask you questions about things which disturb him, and it is better to help him understand than to shut him off from new experiences.

At the same time, it is important to realize that you should never change all things at once. While you allow Johnny to enter a new range of life in one area, it might be wise to give him all

the old security of your supervision and control in a few other respects. And maybe, while you think he ought to have a chance to find out what the kids on the other street are like, you wouldn't want him to experiment with that tough gang over there just yet.

In short, one of the important things to know about your children is just what they are and are not ready for, and to arrange for their lives and your way of handling them accordingly.

Sniffles

FOR COUGHS DUE TO COLDS

It is hardly possible for even the healthiest body to grow up without catching a cold at one time or another. There is nothing upsetting about it. Sometimes children lose colds quite as suddenly as they get them, provided adults don't interfere and do the wrong things. We know that some coughs are due to a simple cold. We all know the precautions to take and how to help the child get over both the cough and the cold. Some coughs are more important—they are symptoms of a special disease, and they need much more detailed care.

There is one thing we all know today—and even the merchandised drugs admit it on their labels—and that is you can't do the right thing for a cough unless you find out what has caused it. And you wouldn't perform a thorax operation for a cough due to a cold. The same thing is worth watching for in the "emotional coughs" your youngster develops now and then. It is impossible for your child to grow up without misbehaving, without being upset or upsetting at one time or another. At the same time, it is well known that though most of this misbehavior remains harmless and disappears if handled wisely, some is of a more serious nature and needs very special care indeed. You need to

remember the following in order to understand upsetting behavior in Johnny or Mary, and to handle it wisely:

Don't be fooled by how it sounds.

Some coughs sound awful, but are only part of a heavy cold, while some of the most pernicious tubercular coughs sound very mild indeed but are serious. Misbehavior of children, too, is sometimes like this. It is sometimes very dramatic and discomforting to the adult. Don't let that worry you; it need not mean so much. At other times misbehavior is less "audible," but an inspection may prove that serious things are wrong. The important point is not to react to your first feeling of alarm or confidence, but to look around a little to size things up and see what they really are.

THINGS TURN UP IN THE WRONG PLACES

"Tell you a secret!"

Once in a while something gets lost, seems to have disappeared, but suddenly turns up in the most unexpected place. The same thing may happen to the emotional needs and behavior of your child. These are frequent examples:

Mary is wild in school, can't keep quiet for a minute, creates a disturbance all the time. Looking closely you notice this: she happens to have a rather fussy Mom, can't have any company at home who would fit her age and be fun. Her need for social activity has to be shoved into time set aside for schoolwork.

Johnny is scared of his teacher; he thinks she doesn't like him much, doesn't give him a break, doesn't expect he will measure up to standards anyhow. Though school is a rather frightful thing for him, he can't quite afford to say so in the open, or rebel against what he thinks is the teacher's injustice. In that case, don't be too surprised if he suddenly becomes sassy and grouchy at home, fresh with his parents, suspicious of their feelings toward him. What he does is simply this: he lets the feelings generated at school turn up in the wrong places.

The cure for such problems is simple—parents and teachers should give the youngsters a chance to work out difficulties where they occur; then they won't turn up in the wrong places. Or if you can't do that, help the children see what they are doing, and help them take with your personal support what might be too much for them to handle alone.

SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO "TASTE" IT

Taste it

Occasionally a cupful of sugar may look as though it were salt, or a bowl with what seems to be flour may contain starch. In short, sometimes you can't tell by just looking at the surface; you have to taste the contents to know what you really have. There is nothing fancy about this; you don't have to be a specialist to run into a situation such as this. It happens every day in even the best arranged and most commonplace kitchen.

The same thing holds for some of the disturbing human behavior. You can't always figure it out at first glance. This doesn't mean that you necessarily need to send your

children to a laboratory for an analysis—but it might help to taste the stuff and see what it really is.

Bob's teacher came to me mad as hops because since last week Bob had been throwing spitballs at her—a thing he had never

Spitballs

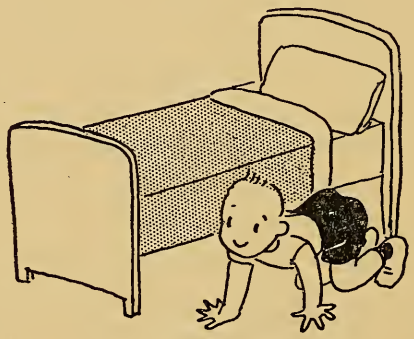
done before. Miss Jones likes Bob a lot, wants him to like her, and is upset because he suddenly seems to dislike her so much. Well, she needn't worry. A simple analysis of the situation shows that Bobby's spitballs don't mean hatred or dislike. This behavior is made of different stuff just as salt and sugar are. Bobby loves his teacher. Recently, a new child entered the class, and the teacher spent a lot of time with him. Bobby didn't understand that. He began to feel that the teacher wasn't interested in him any more and thought there was only one way of getting her interest back. His spitballs were really signals of affection, not darts of hate.

Mary has been hard to handle recently. "I can't have the other children in now," her mother complains. "She becomes so entirely uncontrollable in their presence. I don't know what has gotten into her." Don't be fooled by this surface appearance of things. Pick up a piece of her "wild behavior" and taste it. This is what you may learn: Mary isn't wild at all; she is scared. She has recently become interested, as she should, in being liked and accepted by other children, but they seem somewhat strange and are an exclusive and cliquy bunch. Her fresh behavior

toward her mother when other youngsters appear does not mean disrespect. It means a frantic effort to hide her fear of what the older children may think of her.

Much of children's disturbing behavior may really be rather different from what it seems. However, you can always find out what it really is. Just don't take things that happen at their face value unless you are quite sure of what is going on. If in doubt, let your taste buds assist your eyes. Then you will know better what to do about the behavior that disturbs you.

PLAYING HIDE-AND-SEEK



Not under the bed

If you really want to hide something, the best place is not under the bed or in the closet, but somewhere which doesn't appear to be a likely hiding place—a place which "blends" so well with the everyday things in the room that the idea of using it for a special hiding place is unexpected. If you play hide-and-seek with a smart youngster, you should remember this. You also should remember it if you search for hidden meanings in your child's behavior. All the elaborate study of child development and psychiatry has, in a nutshell, taught us this: sometimes

Teasing

the most "commonplace" and "seemingly meaningless or obvious" behavior is used to hide a problem.

Following are some of the most frequent "hiding places" for problems which psychiatrists have unearthed:

If Tom is afraid and wants to hide his problems, he may act especially tough, fresh, provocatively independent. . . .

If Mary really dislikes her teacher and is afraid that it might show, she may develop an unnaturally extreme form of submissiveness and politeness toward her. . . .

If Johnny falls in love with Milly before he is ready to admit it even to himself, he may act especially crude and mean to her or any other girls in this group. . . .

If Bob is becoming increasingly afraid of asking even the most harmless questions about sex, he may start using vile language. For everybody is so used to considering vile language a sign of great sophistication that Bob thinks it is the safest cover-up for modesty and innocence. . . .

If your little girl is really upset by the sudden appearance of her baby brother, she may force herself into pretending special affection and enthusiasm for him. As soon as you show her that you understand if she doesn't love him all the time, she will be able to act natural again. . . .

All this does not mean that you should look for a skeleton in every closet. What is implied here is this: if Johnny's or Mary's behavior is what it seemed to be, then it will naturally yield to whatever ways you have found effective in handling it. If Johnny's or Mary's behavior begins to astound you and become worse no matter what you try, then there is a good chance it may not be quite what it looked like on the surface. In that case, some of the hints given here should be tried.

Acting big

WHAT ARE HABITS MADE OF?

The concept of "habit formation" has really become the bogeyman for parents and teachers. Its application by eager but uninformed adults has done more damage to children than all the bad habits themselves could have done. This is not the place for an essay on modern psychology. But following are some practical hints which may be helpful to the parent or teacher who worries.

Some things that look like habits aren't habits at all.

Some behavior of children is important and very repetitive at a certain age, so it will turn up a lot. But it is *not* habit-forming. It will disappear of its own accord, when the children leave the developmental phase they are in. This is obvious for behavior such as crawling on all fours, putting everything into their mouths, and playing with their toes. All babies go through a stage where they show intensive repetition of such behavior which looks exactly like habits. Yet you don't find many adults who really have formed the habit of walking on all fours. This behavior becomes habitual for a while, disappears when it has outlived its

developmental usefulness, and does *not* become fixated by simple repetition. In those cases where people seem to retain such behavior, there are very special reasons why something has gone wrong, and it is an entirely different story from that of habit formation, and should be treated differently.

It may help you to know this: most behavior which is typical of a certain *developmental phase* should *not* be confused with habit formation. It does not have a tendency to remain. On the contrary, it has a tendency to disappear unless something especially wrong is done to the child to fix it. The examples previously mentioned are rather obvious. The following also are typical "developmental" forms of behavior which are often confused with habits: thumb-sucking, nail-biting, playing with genitals, some of the typically adolescent types of smoking, the use of wild language or tough behavior in order to show emancipation from childhood, and daydreaming. Determining whether something *is* becoming a habit, or whether it is simply one of those developmental mannerisms which will disappear by themselves, sometimes calls for a little more specific thinking and analysis of the total life situation of Johnny or Mary. But such an analysis is worth while.

Some things that look like "habits" are much more serious and cannot be changed by simple tricks.

This is especially true of all behavior which is part of a *neurotic symptom.* Such behavior is often confused with habits. However, a habit would respond to wise interference. Neurotic symptoms cannot do that. They need psychiatric treatment before they can budge. Into this category go many things like these: winking or blinking the eyes, facial tics, compulsive nail-biting, excessive masturbation, intensive hair-pulling, exhaustive daydreaming with partial amnesia, extreme restlessness to a degree that looks definitely pathological. Or, on the other side of the picture: extreme need for orderliness, fearful avoidance of any form of untidiness—even such a harmless thing as using finger-

paint or playing with clay—excessive submissiveness and obedience to adults or other children, compulsion to work far beyond reason and against all normal needs for childhood play.

Just as with "bad habits," behavior which seems to be "good habits" may often be something entirely different and may need much more specific attention. To help you feel more comfortable —remember that almost any child not only picks up this or that habit during his years of development and drops it again, but he also develops this or that neurotic pattern at times and outgrows it again. Nevertheless, it is worth while to keep a certain amount of vigilance: if things which look like habits do not disappear of themselves or under the impact of very wise handling, then it is better to check on their real nature. A childhood neurosis treated in its beginning saves untold amounts of money and worry in later years.

And what if it really is a habit?

Behavior which is more or less what people call "habits" needs wise handling too. To understand the nature of habits, it will be helpful to remember the following facts from the findings of childhood research.

Bites his nails

1. *Habits cannot be broken by the use of force without doing damage to your child.*

If you want to fight Johnny's habit of biting his nails by hitting him over the mouth every time he does so, he may stop biting his nails. The habit may seem to disappear. However, nobody is fooled about this matter but yourself. The habit didn't disappear. It went underground. It is going to come up in some other place, or it is now eating its way into the depths of your child, destroy-

ing the subtle and tremendously vital tissues of self-confidence, inner security, and confidence in others.

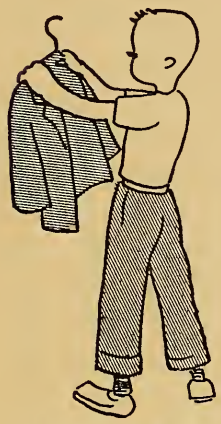
Castles in the air

2. *Habits can be outgrown if parents and teachers will apply the principle of "double security."*

If Johnny has developed a habit, it is for one of two reasons: he is afraid of leaving behavior of a previous developmental stage and hangs onto it beyond reason, or, he is afraid of picking up new ways of life and not feeling at ease with them. Find out whether his habit is kept by the power of the past, or produced by the fear of the present. Then give him security in both respects and the habit will be dropped. For instance: Johnny has become a habitual daydreamer of late. It is getting so bad that he doesn't know where he is half the time, and the teacher is getting frantic. After looking into the matter, you find this: Johnny was very much at ease with the youngsters he played with in grade school. The present seventh grade bunch are new to him; they are also tougher than he: he does not know how to behave without either being laughed at by them or feeling guilty for becoming as wild as they are. So his need to escape into a daydream becomes more and more habitual. Instead of scolding him for it and making him more insecure than he already is, give him your personal sympathy and help him with the actual problem of social adjustment. His habit will recede to the normal amount of daydreaming every child shows at this age.

Mary seems to have picked up an awful habit of throwing her clothes around, keeping her room messy, being untidy in appearance. She refuses to take to your teachings of the good habits of orderliness, punctuality, and cleanliness. Upon investigation you find this: Mary has developed faster than you know. You have continued too long to treat her like a "cute little child,"

but actually she is now at the age where it is perfectly normal for youngsters to be considered somewhat emancipated and part of their own crowd. Her disorderly habits are actually a way in which to prove to herself her independence from you. They can be reduced to a tolerable minimum by two ways: (1) develop a less mother—little-baby type of relationship between yourself and her; and (2) find lots of company for her so she can be happy with other children her own age on her own level.



Learns to be neat

3. *Good habits vanish unless they are carefully nurtured.*

Some people think they can instill good habits into children by fear, suppression, and force. They are very foolish. They can't tell a really good habit from a surface submission to an enforced tyrannical rule. These so-called good habits usually are so superficial that the slightest letup on pressure, the absence of fear, or the reduction of supervision causes them to crumble. Really lasting good habits need time to grow and must be lovingly nurtured. A really lasting good habit grows only when a child accepts it because the adult to whom it seems so important is important in the child's life.

Johnny fights his teacher and the demands of orderliness she stands for. At last he surrenders to her wise attempts to win him over. He begins to love and admire her, still keeping his desire for disorderly conduct intact. After a while—and it does take time—this conflict between his personal love for his teacher and his disorderly behavior begins to worry him. In the long run, this is what will happen: Johnny accepts not only the teacher, but the demands of orderliness she stands for. His old, bad habit can be swapped for a new and better one through the impact of wisely-handled love.

DEVELOPING HIS PERSONALITY

We have talked so much in recent years about personality development. And there is no doubt this term refers to the most important thing in the growth of your child, but where does it show? A child's personality isn't something that remains the same, that you can put your finger on, that remains a well-organized, compact structure from which the radiations of behavior emanate. Mostly, it is the other way round: we get in touch only with what children do and say. It is by watching their behavior and listening to their stories and fantasies that we may reconstruct what parts of their personality are really forming within them and what they are like.

Well, don't let this complication bother you too much. You don't have to become an X-ray specialist to help a youngster develop a healthy body, and you don't have to become a psychiatrist to help your child develop a healthy mind. But you do have to know enough about bodies and minds to notice when whole parts are missing, or aren't prospering as they should, and you do want to check up from time to time on what is happening inside. This is easy. Your child's personality unfolds before you in everyday life. There are many loopholes in his behavior through which personality development clearly shows. Following are some of them.

Who does he think he is?

Small children have little awareness of their personality. But gradually there emerges something like an idea of who they are and who they want to be, an awareness of a certain "role" they play in the world they live in. Sometimes this image of one's own personality is a little lopsided. When this is the case these are some of the extremes you want to steer between: Is he

Aware of herself

unduly pessimistic in his outlook on life? Afraid to hold his own? Convinced of his own inferiority, inability, worthlessness? Or, at the opposite extreme, is he so sure of himself that he begins to be uncritical? Get on other people's nerves? Be unrealistic in evaluating his own capacity? Is he just healthily self-centered? Or is he so possessed with the idea of his own importance that it practically amounts to a lack of awareness of the rest of the world and of other people's ways and needs? Which part of himself is he most unnecessarily worried or embarrassed about? Which part of himself does he think about most? Which part of himself is he reasonably or unreasonably proud of?

Does he know his body is his for keeps?

Little children are often not very sharply aware of the difference between body and mind. When they grow older, something like a body image and attitudes toward their own body emerge. Most youngsters may at times drift between two extremes. They may be unduly impressed with the importance of their body and everything that happens to it. Or they may develop a certain neglect, disrespect, even rejection of everything that concerns their body. Adolescents often switch quickly from one attitude to the other.

In which direction is your youngster going now? Do body-

things concern him too much? Is he scared, ashamed, apprehensive about diseases? Developmental changes? Or does he develop a "tough" attitude toward health and body, considering it sissy stuff to obey health rules or demands for reasonable clothing and protection from fatigue and cold? Is he stubborn about matters of food and diet? Have you done enough to help him get acquainted with his body and what it means? Have you prepared him for the developmental changes which the body will undergo, so he won't be unduly worried about things that are perfectly normal or ignorant of things that may damage his adult life? Or are you interfering so much that your youngster has all his body attitudes taken care of by you, and doesn't even develop a responsibility for his body because you never let him realize it is his?

Beautiful like Mother

At times your child will naturally be confused about all this—when his body changes, his attitude toward it gets into temporary confusion too. Do not be alarmed. Avoid shock techniques or anything which makes him feel fearful and insecure or guilty and ashamed. Take your time, but give him the help he needs, to develop not only a healthy body but also a healthy attitude toward it and all its functions.

What does "work" mean to him?

Attitudes toward work and duties grow over a long period of years. Every once in a while it may be worth while to check just where you are. Here are some of the thoughts which might guide you in such a checkup:

How does your child take to all those things which spell "work" for his level of development? Are they things he enjoys so that he develops a feeling that work can be meaningful and fun? Or are all or most of them so distasteful to him that only constant pressure or lure makes him halfway perform? Are certain areas of real interest and enjoyment emerging? Are other areas of distaste and avoidance of activities and interests becoming visible? What are they?

Helping

Watch also for this. Some people are rather too possessive about their work. They want to do all of it themselves, so much so that they cannot delegate duties to other people later on in life. Others are a little too free about letting the other fellow do all the work they are supposed to do. Which, if either, of the two attitudes becomes visible in your child? He will need some of both; so take care not to crush one while you encourage the other. How dependent is your child in his relationship to work?

Sharing

Is work all geared in terms of subsequent reward? Or is some of it self-motivating? Does it depend on whether the people he works for or with like or dislike him? Can he sometimes continue with work even though he is temporarily discouraged? Or does the slightest disturbance in personal relationship upset his whole ability to perform? Can he work with others? Or does he have to shine for himself all the time, take complete charge of the work? Does he like to see tasks finished? Or does he often shift work processes in midstream?

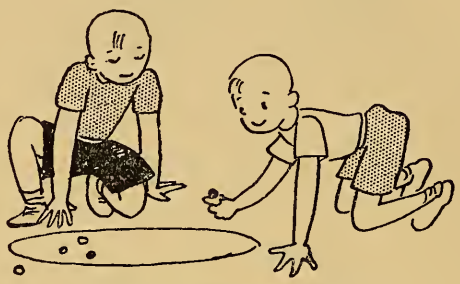
Does he know how to have fun?

The ability to relax, enjoy oneself and others, have a good time in a reasonable way is just as important for the future life of children as their ability to work and live with others. It is the result of as long and as complex a pattern of experiences as all their other traits. The following are some of the questions you might ask yourself from time to time.

Is the amount of pleasure Johnny needs just about what you would expect for a child of his age? Or is it way over or way under? If he is suddenly frustrated about a pleasurable expectation, what is he likely to do? Is he likely to throw a tantrum? Cry? Sulk? Be unhappy? Hit his brother? Beat up his playmates? Withdraw from play entirely? Feel guilty and ashamed? Or

will he remain cheerful and look around for other avenues of fun?

With whom does he like to have his fun? Himself only? Others, too? If with others, in what degree and role of participation? Is it more fun *with* people he enjoys? Or does it always have to be fun at somebody's expense? Does he tend to budget fun in terms of time and amount? Or is any interference with his



Fun with others

pleasure diet reacted to with extreme frustration and confusion or rebellion and fury? What things mean most fun to him? Just what is it in them that is so much fun? Does having a good time make your child feel happy, exuberant, hyperaggressive? Or guilty and fearful? Which forms of fun does he seek, avoid, respect, despise?

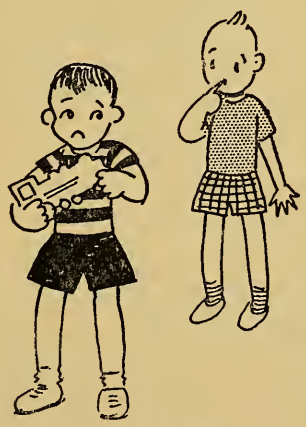
How about the things he owns?

Relationship to property may begin with the way children react to their toys, and they may go through many changes while they grow. Do not consider any one of these stages final. But look from time to time to see which ones they have gone through, which others they might have to experiment with later. Here is part of what you will find:

Some children are hoarders. They like to have a lot, just for the sake of having. Some even want to have things they don't enjoy, just so that others can't enjoy them, either. Some children may not mind what others have—at least so long as they get a

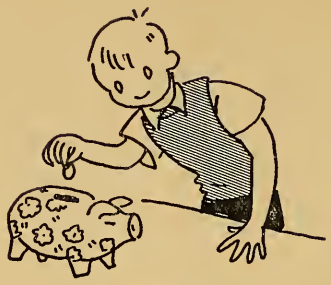
reasonable share. Owning is only one part of the story. The other part is what they do with things they own. Some children need things they can use: take apart, put together, destroy. Often children do not mind if a possession gets used up while they enjoy it, but sometimes they are so interested in owning that they hardly dare use and enjoy what they have.

Sometimes children will shift their relationship to the toy into a relationship to other people. Thus, the toy isn't a thing to play with, but a thing to barter, to use as a bribe, or as blackmail—a thing to make others envious, a means of gaining power. They may also use their possessions for the purchase of affection and love, popularity and importance, friendship and happy sharing. Some children are rather realistic about all this. Others weave their possessions into fantasies until they become much



"It's mine"

more meaningful to them than they would have been ordinarily. Which kind of things and toys does your child covet? How does he play with them, if he does? What do acquisition and loss mean to him? At the age where money begins to become one of the important factors in Johnny's possessional life, you may want to ask these questions again, for the importance that toys had for him may have shifted to money.



He has a bank

All in all, do not be too rigid at this stage. Your child needs many different attitudes toward things and money. He may even need to be capable of having conflicting ones—a healthy adult must be able to save as well as spend, withhold as well as give, reserve as well as share, and use up as well as spare. Thus, your child must be able to practice all these attitudes at times. But keep a check on whether any one of them becomes too predominant over too long a period of time, or whether any one of the others remains undernourished too long.

Do animals and your child get along?

The relationship of children to animals is perhaps one of the most revealing fields in which to learn about personality development. However, too many commonplace generalities have been uttered on this subject. Do not be fooled by them. The real development of children is as wide and rich in this field as in any other, and you want to look at this chapter of your child's life with an especially vivid awareness of the great variety of things you will find.

Some animals play a different role from others. Your child does not have to love all of them all the time to become a happy citizen. You will find that most children start out by being cruel to animals. This is unfortunate, but understandable. They consider them at first as so many things or gadgets to handle and have little awareness or interest beyond taking them apart.

By the time they begin to understand the difference between animate and inanimate things, they should be able to control some of their urge to be cruel. This awareness will first emerge toward animals which belong to them. The family dog, cat, or horse should be excluded from cruel exploration long before a turtle or a butterfly.

Toward some animals, youngsters will always retain a double relationship—just as adults do. Fish, turtles, frogs may once be pets to be fed and cared for and proudly owned. Then they may suddenly become the prey of the hunter, to be caught, dissected,

What makes it swim?

stuffed, bartered. Do not be upset if you find your child switching between these relationships. It is perfectly normal. However, it is not perfectly normal if your child develops too prolonged an attitude of simple use and cruelty toward animals which he knows best. His dog, cat, any pet should be assuming more the role of another child than that of a gadget or hunting prey. Prolonged cruelty toward them should be evaluated differently from the customary thoughtlessness of many children toward animals subject to the huntsman's code.

The relationship which Johnny's pet assumes to him is often worth watching. It may be either a healthy extension of living

or a frantic attempt to substitute for what he lacks and ought to get elsewhere. The degree to which he loves and takes care of his pets is also an indication of the realism or lack of it which at that stage enters into his relationship to people. Do not be surprised at astounding elements of unreality or selfish love. Do not wonder too much if a child occasionally forgets to feed or care for the animal he loves. But if you find too much difference between fantastic and realistic levels of relationships, then it may be worth while to check.

The value of using animals to make up for loneliness in children's lives has often been overestimated. Animals certainly can fill the gap of empty or unhappy hours. On the other hand, you do not really want your child to resort to this kind of substitution. You want him to put all the work and effort it takes into establishing lasting relationships with human beings, instead of retiring into the master-slave relationship with his dog. Much of the value of a healthy pal relationship between a child and his pet is sound, but some of the glorification of animals has been overdone and is dangerous.

His own puppy

The same factors which we have mentioned about children's relationship to animals also holds for their relationship to other children. They will have to balance the fun of having Mary as a playmate with the kind of satisfactions that can be had when with her. These satisfactions may extend from enjoying her as a person, open envy, superiority of domination, acceptance by the socially superior, and similar reactions right into the area of the

genuine human relationships of love and friendship. You will have to realize that all this may have to come in stages or spurts, but from time to time you may want to check just where your child is at a given moment.

YOUR CHILD AND HIS GROUP

Gang

When children are small, the group means little more to them than the presence or absence of other children with whom they can play or fight. In grade school the teacher is likely to be successful in developing a feeling among all the children that they are a group around the adult. It is a little like a revival of family group feeling and can be used to good advantage. However, it is usually not before the later grade school years (fourth to seventh) that an entirely new type of "we" feeling becomes more important to them. In those years they develop a strong need to feel a part of their own age-gang, even if this need demands they act apart from or against the adult. At this time it is very important that your child do something about that need—yield to it, even if yielding spells temporary and seemingly distressing conflict with you or the school.

Mary's trouble about "talking too much in class" may, at that

age, be only the way she gives credit to the important step forward of establishing rapport with her own age-group. The reason why Johnny is at home so little and so late may really be that he is now doing the important learning of how to survive in a neighborhood gang. The taste of a little gang psychology is worth while for later use. The experience of too much of it at a time in too heavy doses may not be desirable. It is good to check up on this at certain intervals.

Being a member of a group is an emotionally important experience for your child. Sometimes organizations can help him get a sufficient and well-balanced amount of it. Youth organizations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, and especially camps, both public and private, have made this service their main concern. However, an organization may be very good, and yet a certain subgroup in it may not be the right thing for Johnny or Mary at this moment. So you may want to be thoughtful and analytical in all the considerations which go into the question—when and to which group shall I send my child?

One warning should be given here: the desirability of exposing growing children to group experiences has been emphasized so

Privacy

much and so often that we have forgotten about the danger of the opposite extreme. We often get too worried if children are not quite ready for, and interested in, the type of group experience we have provided for them. In that case, we tend to call them introverts, get worried about their being "isolated," and then make things worse by forcing them into too much company too early. Therefore, it should be said here that no matter how much value group life has for your child, he still has a right to and need for plenty of *privacy*. It is normal that children should enjoy groups. But it is just as normal that they should often want to be left alone, to do what they like, to loaf without having to play any important group role, to be away from the crowd. Protect the privacy of your child in the framework of group experience you plan for him; let him have some room for himself but offer him enough group experiences to use if he needs them. Remember—he always needs both.

JOHNNY AND THE WORLD AROUND HIM

We know how important and difficult it is for children to figure out the use of language, the meaning and laws of mechanical devices, the power of water, fire, and electricity, and all the phenomena of the animal and plant world. We know that they have to assimilate all this in a well-balanced way. We know how long it will take and how periods of stagnation and sudden spurts of understanding and interest in new areas will alternate. Enough has been said about the intellectual development of children, therefore we need not go into detail here.

The world around Johnny is not only one of botany and zoology. It is also one of social cliques, cultural customs, religious and philosophical value systems. It is a world in which one must make friends and develop values. And sooner or later Johnny will

run into problems which have a social base. He will become aware that the people around him are not just "so many other people," but that we look either up or down to each other, that even they consider themselves alike or different, superior or inferior. He will discover the existence of caste and class, of poverty and wealth, of racial and religious loyalties.

All this will not just happen "theoretically." He will run into a child who is different from any he knew before and also from what you led him to expect. He will have to figure out for himself the illogical stupidity of prejudices, even though these may be shared by the adults he admires most, including you; and he may become dissatisfied with the order of things in which he finds himself because he has not contributed to the factors which brought him exactly to this situation. He will also become self-conscious about his own place in the order of things. He will, for a while, consider it all-important to be Negro or white, or Jewish or Protestant or Catholic, or he may temporarily be upset about it and revolt against being any one. To grasp the total significance of the social universe is hard enough for our philosophers and sociologists—the men who have made a profound study of these aspects of life. Little wonder Johnny often gets confused about it.

Children have to find their place in the scheme of things, and it behooves us to help them in this search. Do not get upset by things they say or do, by attitudes of prejudice way beyond what you would like them to show, or of radicalism way beyond what you believe in. They must experience a lot of confusion and problem behavior one way or another to grow into the complex social beings they are expected to be today. With your own child it is wise not to push things too fast or to drive into him the concepts you hold. It is also wise not to try to avoid things by forbidding your youngster to think certain thoughts or to like people of whom you disapprove. The more secure and confident your child feels with you and his teachers, the better he will be prepared for life.

JOHNNY AND THE WORLD ABOVE HIM

"God bless . . ."

Religion isn't just a thing you begin to teach at a certain age. And even if you would want to refrain from teaching any of it, at some time or other your child will begin to wonder about concepts like God, destiny, death, life after death, guilt and value, heaven and hell. Different religious denominations find different answers. Actually, your child begins to wonder along this line long before a religious—or anti-religious—attitude is suggested by his parent.

Many of the attitudes children have toward God and the universe don't fall under the heading of "religion." For, even within their own religious and church code, children often show a lot of differences among themselves. Some, for instance, seem to expect the worst from life and God—always afraid they will be punished or hurt, always considering themselves treated unfairly, not getting the share they think they deserve. Others, again, may have developed an extremely optimistic outlook on life: they take it for granted that God and the world owe and will give them a living, they are confident they can inveigle the forces

that shape the world into granting their wishes at any time. Some of them become tricky in the process—their prayers have more the character of blackmail or bribe than of actual devotion to a power above. Most of them go through all these stages eventually. From time to time, it may be interesting to investigate just how much of the problem of life in its largest meaning has yet impressed your child.

THINKING STRAIGHT ABOUT YOUR CHILD

"I give up!"

So much misunderstanding has been spread about the real meaning of "understanding" a child that a few words of caution might be advisable to keep what has been said here from being wrongly applied.

Understanding your child does not mean coddling him.

The fact that you understand what he does, does not imply that you approve of it. But it does imply that you are going to think straight before you act. For you will want to do whatever

helps him grow up better, not necessarily what you might like to do to get rid of your own feeling of discomfort, upset, or fury. Thus, understanding will prevent stupid adult temper tantrums, so often misinterpreted as firm behavior, but it will *not* prevent you from evaluating and acting in favor of a positive change.

Ferrets out secret

Understanding your child does not always mean that you will know what to do.

The fact that you understand why Johnny did this or that does not mean that automatically you know what to do about it. The question of what to do about a thing is a more involved one; it takes specific thought about specific cases, and cannot be answered in a book. But understanding Johnny is the first *condition* under which you can start looking for an answer to the question of what to do. It is, therefore, the starting-point of all good education for both the parents and the child.

Understanding your child does not mean plaguing him with questions.

Sometimes parents and teachers use modern psychology and its demands for understanding child behavior as an excuse to try

Enjoy your child

and figure out every little move Johnny makes, to ferret out every little secret Mary tries to keep to herself. Such an attitude is very bad. It takes a pleasant parent away from a child and gives him a tactless psychologist instead. Much of that understanding has to be done without Johnny's or Mary's knowledge. Most of it has to be done without questioning or talking about it. Where questioning and talking are involved, tact and respect for the feelings of the child himself are the first demands for good work. No wise adult tries to understand or know everything all the time. The privacy of a human life needs to be respected at all times.

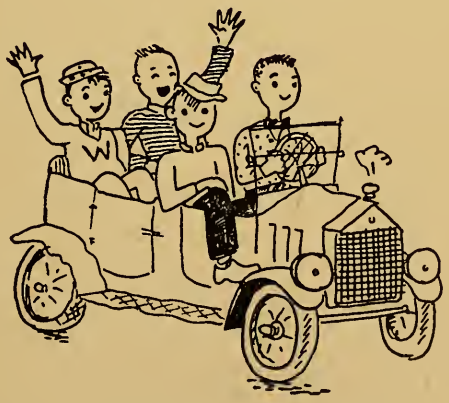
Understanding your child does not mean becoming fussy and hypersensitive.

Remember, children are basically rather sturdy creatures. They can take a lot without showing too many ill effects. Research shows that many of the things happening to neurotic or delinquent adults have also happened, at times, to normal, healthy individuals. People become neurotic or delinquent only after prolonged and consistent mishandling by parents and teachers. That means you don't have to be afraid if you don't understand everything all of the time. There is leeway for experimentation and for occasional and harmless mistakes.

The really understanding adult needs to have some understanding of his own needs and feelings as well as of those of the child. If you find yourself asking any one of these previously suggested questions every once in a while when you get worried about something, you are on the right track. For the rest of the time don't worry whether you understand everything—go ahead and enjoy your child and yourself.

Understanding your child does not mean you should shun expert help and advice.

Occasionally we run into parents and teachers who seem to understand so much about children that they are scared stiff they might sometime have to ask a question about them. This is all wrong. The trained eyes of an observer who is not too emotionally entangled in the situation can help the most understanding parent and teacher enormously. Such matters as the differentiation between a cause for mild anxiety and a serious cause for worry, or between developmental misbehavior and a real beginning of delinquency often demand professional consultation. Asking for help and advice is not a sign of incompetence. On the contrary, a really wise and understanding person is one who knows when he needs help.



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